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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, November 24, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NOTES FOR THANKSGIVING SHOPPERS." Information from the Consumers' Counsel, A.A.A. and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Last-minute news for the food-shopper is on our program today. The regular fortnightly notes on supplies and prices of seasonal foods have just arrived--just in the nick of time, too, for the listener who does her marketing on the last day in the afternoon.

In general, the markets this year are offering more cranberries and fixings, but less turkey than last year. And as you might expect, prices of turkeys--and chickens and other meats, too, for that matter--are higher than they were for Thanksgiving 1936, while prices of cranberries, potatoes, sweet-potatoes, nuts, apples and most other fixings are lower.

As for the number of turkeys on the market, the supply this year is about a tenth less than last year. But last year's turkey crop was the very largest on record. So the supply of turkeys this year will be ample--as many turkeys as we had in '32, '33, and '34, and more than in '35 when the crop was small. The first estimates about turkeys that came in this fall were that the birds would come to market earlier this year and also be heavier than usual. After that, unfavorable weather slowed up their growth somewhat. If you want to reckon the cost of your dinner, here's a tip from the New York markets about turkey prices. By mid-November wholesale prices of dressed turkeys were selling in New York from 3 to 5 cents a pound above last year's relatively low levels.

Now about selecting your turkey. Government turkey grades are taking the guesswork out of choosing a bird. Turkeys are tagged in 4 grades. There is a "Grade AA", also called "U.S. Special." And there is "Grade A" or "U.S. Prime". After that come "Grade B" or "U.S. Choice;" and "Grade C" or "U.S. Commercial." The tags also state whether the turkey is old or young, hen or tom. Grade A usually is the top commercial grade since few Grade AAA turkeys reach markets. The difference in grade depends mostly on the amount of fat over the entire carcass; the flesh covering the breast, thighs, and back; and the care used in bleeding and dressing. No bird that is bruised enough to make any appreciable amount of the carcass inedible can measure up to U.S. turkey standards. And no emaciated bird can either. Birds tagged as "Young" are usually less than a year old, soft-meated, with flexible breast bones, while those labelled "old" are more than a year old with tougher flesh and a hardened bone. If you want a small turkey to suit a small family, a hen will be your best bargain probably--at least in the ratio of flesh to bone. Toms are generally larger in size. And the larger the tom, the more flesh in proportion to bone. Mature toms are the buy for the big family.



Now, if you are considering some other bird than turkey for your dinner, here's the general news about poultry supplies. Other poultry supplies also are smaller than last year's and prices are higher. Wholesale prices of fresh-dressed chickens in New York in mid-November were from 3 to 7 cents a pound higher than a year ago while fowls were up 2 to 5 cents a pound. Lighter weight poultry has had the sharpest price increases this year.

So much for the Thanksgiving bird. Now about the fixings. Record-size cranberry crop this year has naturally brought lower prices. The cranberry crop this year is about 50 percent larger than a year ago and is considerably above average. In mid-November the wholesale prices of cranberries in New York was about a dollar 50 for a 25-pound barrel lower than a year ago.

As for choosing your berries, no doubt you know that high-quality cranberries are always plump, firm, fresh-looking and have a high shine. Avoid berries that are dull, soft or shrivelled. The color and size of the berries depend more on variety than on quality. The small dark red berries happen to be a bit sweeter than the larger bright-red kind.

Other fruits for Thanksgiving are plentiful this year, and prices in general are lower than last year. Larger supplies of apples, grapes, pears and oranges are on the market. Though the grapefruit crop is expected to be smaller than last year's record production, prices of grapefruit will probably not be much different from a year ago. Of all the fruits, apples will probably show the biggest drop in price from 1936. The current apple crop is the largest since '26 and is over 75 percent larger than a year ago.

Lower nut prices this year will also help cut the cost of the Thanksgiving dinner. Record crops of almonds, walnuts, filberts and above-average production of pecans are indicated for this year. The total nut production is 60 percent larger than a year ago and only slightly under the record reached in 1935 when we had our bumper crop of pecans. As for chestnuts, all of them now on the market are imported and we have no report of supplies.

More and cheaper potatoes and sweetpotatoes on the market this year to go with the Thanksgiving bird. Both the potato crop and the sweetpotato crop this year are a sixth above a year ago and above average. Prices of white potatoes, you know, have been very near half their 1936 level.

Now about butter and eggs. Butter will probably be higher in price than it was last Thanksgiving but eggs will be cheaper, especially storage and average-grade fresh eggs. Both butter and egg prices are expected to hit their season's high point this month.

Finally about the vegetables for your Thanksgiving dinner. The markets are offering about the same amount of fresh vegetables as they did a year ago but more and cheaper canned vegetables. Many more fresh carrots are on the market this year but considerably less string beans. As for celery, that favorite Thanksgiving vegetable, a little more celery is on the market this year than last. By the way, crispness is the key to celery quality. You can test it by snapping a stalk. Avoid pithy, stringy, and open-textured celery with air spaces in the middle.

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